

Scientific versus colloquial names

The article by Barry Goater (*antea* 32-33) and my comments that followed it (*antea* 33-34), concerning the relative priorities given in articles to scientific and colloquial names has generated a colossal response and the Editor's post bag has never been so full. Around 20 letters or cards and 63 e-mails have been received, indicating that this subject evidently is of greater importance to many people than I had imagined! Many opinions are expressed rather too strongly for publication and, in any event, there are too many communications for all to be used in print. Several missed the point entirely – I do not believe that it was Goater's intention that English names should be banned, just relegated to second place. Of the 83 receipts, 10 felt that English names should not be used at all, 41 felt that scientific names ought to be given priority and 32 were in favour of English names taking the fore. A very few of the more significant contributions are included below

Meanwhile, I am interested to discover that in the recent field guide to British macro moths, authored by Waring and Townsend, there is a British macro-moth species, that does not appear to have an English name. *Callopietria latreillei* (Dup.) (Noctuidae), also has no colloquial appellation in the late John Bradley's checklist nor in Harley Books' *Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland*. Just in case anybody wants to give it one I do, inevitably, have an English name for it, summarily created during a trip to the Tarn Region of France in October 2004 with Marcel Ashby, Rachel Terry and Martin Townsend, when many examples of this species were attracted to the lights: "The Baggy-trousered Moth" has priority. I will be interested indeed to see if anyone can tell me (informally) why that name is relevant to this species (and you will probably not be able to work it out from a dead, museum specimen). — EDITOR.

Further thoughts on the Continent cut off by fog

How refreshing to read the article by Barry Goater on the naming of British Lepidoptera. This subject has long undergone scrutiny and in spite of repeated criticism from learned authorities has stubbornly refused to settle down to a level of accepted common sense.

The debate has continued now for almost 250 years. William Curtis (1771), author of *Instructions for collecting and preserving insects, particularly moths and butterflies*, praised the binomial Latin nomenclature devised by Linnaeus but added wistfully that 'It were to be wished that our English names were in general equally expressive.' However, Adrian Hardy Haworth (1803), in his *Lepidoptera Britannica*, was not so sure that all the English names should be 'equally expressive' when he commented that 'Some of our English appellations, it is true, are highly fanciful, not to say absurd, and lead to no information.' He may well have been referring to James Petiver who, in 1695, clearly found difficulty in naming some species when he referred to one of the geometers as 'The Common Grey Garden-Moth with Brown Spots.' In 1937, P. B. M. Allan aimed another swipe at the English names of our moths and butterflies. 'The English [names] in use to-day are impossible, even though some of them are older than those bestowed by Linnaeus' – and after noting

that 'The Lady of the Woods' referred, perhaps inappropriately, to the Orange-tip butterfly, he went on to ask: 'But what were "The Large Goose Egg," "The Small Old Gentlewoman" and "The Cross Barred Housewife"?' Allan went on to show that continental lepidopterists were just as culpable as their British colleagues and many of the popular names of butterflies and moths in France and Germany were equally absurd.

A few years ago I acquired the Lepidoptera collection of the late Douglas Harrison of Cambridge. I was immediately impressed by the English names that he had used. Harrison used printed labels and most species were accorded the scientific name appropriate for the time followed by two English names. The second English names given were immediately recognisable, but the first name under each species was entirely new to me. Many were seemingly ridiculous. What, for instance, was an 'Arched Dwarf,' an 'Upland Slender' or a 'Rowan Ripple'? Unless the labels were privately printed I would suggest that other collectors may have used them as well. A number of these labels are shown in Fig. 1. I would be interested to know the origin of these names and whether or not the printed labels were at one time commercially available.

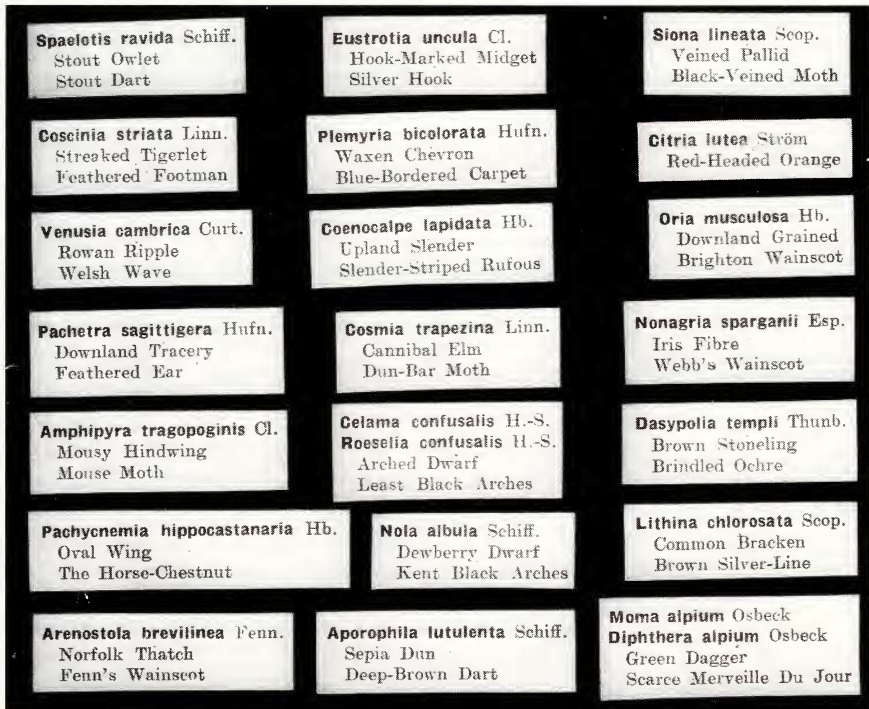


Fig. 1. Labels from the Douglas Harrison Collection.

Although the classics are taught in few but the independent schools today the binomial system first suggested by Linnaeus is standard throughout the world – and it is surprisingly easy for entomologists to remember the scientific names. Furthermore, the scientific names are simply internationally recognised identification tags and it is quite unnecessary to have studied classics in order to feel at home with them. The innumerable English names on the other hand – some species having been accorded more than six different titles – do little to enhance our knowledge of these insects and merely remind us that Goethe – not Goater – once wrote of the ‘fog’ surrounding such names that ‘a name is but sound and smoke veiling heaven’s splendour.’— MICHAEL SALMON, Avon Lodge, Woodgreen, New Forest, Hampshire SP6 2AU.

On the creation of English names for British insects

I will not add to Barry Goater’s lament regarding exasperating vernacular names, but would point out that it seems a pity that those who feel they have the need and opportunity to name a newly discovered British moth should do a bit of homework first. The ‘Minsmere Crimson Underwing’ *Catocala conjuncta* has a perfectly good English name already. A look at plate 17 in W. Wood’s – *Index Entomologicus*, published in 1839 refers on page 77:

Linn. names.	Engl. names	Synonyms and new genera	Habitat, and when found
443 Conjuncta	Lesser Crimson Underwing	St.3, p. 135. 6429 <i>Catocala</i>	Mr. Stephens’s Cabinet; very rare

Then there is the instance of *Harpyia milhauseri* (Fabricius), now known as the ‘Tawny Prominent’. R. R. Picketing (1966. *Entomologist’s Gazette* 1966, **17**: 100) announced the moth as new to Britain in, but did not raise a vernacular name for it. The first use of the name ‘Tawny Prominent’ seems to be that published in I. R. P. Heslop’s Fourth Supplement to the Revised Indexed Check-list of the British Lepidoptera, (1968. *Entomologist’s Gazette* **19**: 147), part of the then on-going Check-list that remains a vast source of curious vernacular names to this day. In Edward Step’s *Marvels of Insect Life* (circa 1910), an article on pages 66-69 refers to *Hoplitis milhauseri*, ‘The Dragon-Moth’, the name referring to the appearance of the larva.

I expect others can add many more, and a quick glance at J. D. Bradley’s – Checklist of Lepidoptera (2000) shows duplicate vernacular names for a number of insects recorded over relatively recent years. Surely the publication of a new name even if an English one, is also the responsibility of an editor. Before spattering our literature with duplicate names some check should be carried out to ensure their novelty.— DAVID WILSON, Lark Rise, Dunwich Road, Blythburgh, Suffolk IP19 9LT.